TALES OF INDIA

EMPEROR BALI



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1. Once there lived a good and just King, named Bali. Though he was defeated by Indra the Rain-God, he was saved in the last moment by his loyal minister, Sukra-Acharya. In course of time he acquired great skill in the art of war and offered battle to Indra once again. This time the Rain-God was thoroughly beaten. and driven into the forest. Henceforth Bali became the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

2. During his long rule the Devathas and the Rakshasas began to enjoy peace and prosperity. Land yielded plenty and life became easy.

3. Aditi, the mother of the Rain-God, shed bitter tears at the helpless condition of her son. She found that the closing part of her life became gloomy.

4. Kasyapa, her husband, came to know of Indra's great misfortune, and her

helpless condition. So, leaving his meditation, he returned to his wife. Aditi fell on his feet, and washed them with her tears. She told him how Bali, the King of the Rakshasas, had taken the throne of heaven, how the Devathas had fled in shame. and how she had been left helpless in the midst of the insulting foe.

5. Kasyapa tried to console her. But she burst again into tears, complaining of the cruel treatment of the Rakshasas. "My Lord", said she, "Heaven has lost its charm, and has become worse than Hell. Sachi, our dear and delicate child, is deprived of all her comforts, and is forced to go a-begging from door to door. Dear Indra, the ruler of the universe, is now reduced to poverty, and is wandering in the fearful forests bewailing his miserable lot in life. Our grand-children are no longer living in plenty; they are going about in the company of fowler-boys. I can no longer bear this insult My heart cries for vengeance."

6. Kasyapa read into the unknown future, and gave his wife a charm. "Dear

wife!" said he, "Do not make light of this charm. You will soon give birth to a son, and he will take up the cause of the Immortals and restore the fallen Indra to his heavenly throne. The day of his birth shall mark the beginning of the fall of the Rakshasa race."

7. Kasyapa then left his wife and returned to his meditation in the woods. Aditi awaited the expected bright future.

8. On an auspicious day, a son was born to Aditi. The child grew up to be an uncommonly active boy. A small rosary of beads was hung around his neck. He wore copper bracelets around his tender wrists. His face was bright as the moon; the pupils of his eyes, and the curls of hair on his head were black as bees: and his well-set teeth were white as pearls. As years passed by, he did not grow in stature; and so he was called Vamana.

9. This Vamana was very clever at his lessons. He studied the Vedas and

understood their meaning. He could recite the various puranas, and he mastered the arts too. Indeed, he was a wonderful dwarf.

10. One day he saw a party of holy Brahmanas returning from a distant place, and went up to them. They were very much surprised at his curious appearance. "Holy men!" said the dwarf. "Do you go and bless the kings at their courts as usual and do they show you the due hospitality in return?"

11. The Brahmanas were pleased with the enquiry of the dwarf "O Dwarf!" they replied. "There are several charitable Kings in this world; but their charity is not without selflessness, as they seek to get name through their charitable acts. Yet there is one, who gives freely out of his riches; and his charity is selfless. He is no other than the famous King Bali. Not only we, but the poor and the needy go to his door, and return rich and contented". So saying they departed.

III

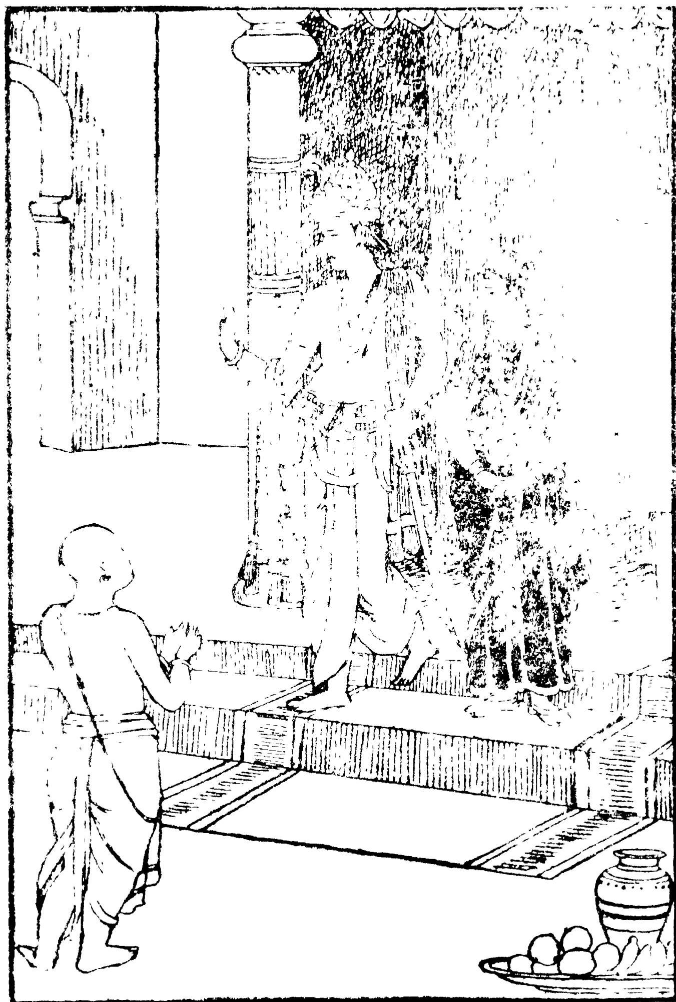
12. The Emperor Bali was busily engaged with the celebration of grand festivities in honour of his great victory. The altar of sacrifice was raised near the temple. Devout prayers were offered to God, and the place became filled with the sweet odours of the burning incense. Thousands of Brahmanas began chanting the Vedic hymns and the sacred mantras at the top of their voice. The victorious Emperor stood on a prominent place, giving freely out of his wealth, and receiving blessings in return.

13. The Dwarf made his appearance on that sacred ground. His strange personality at once attracted the attention of the Emperor. So Bali came down to him and washed his feet while the queen Vindhyavali poured water out of a gold jar. "O Brahmacharin!" said the emperor, "Where do you come from? I consider my life sanctified by your holy presence at this function. Do you want rich robes, heaps of gold, herds of cattle, or a part of

my vast empire? Ask, and you shall have them."

14. The dwarf smiled pleasantly and said, "I give my whole-hearted blessings to thee. I am a wanderer going from place to place. I am as great as I am small; I know the source of all knowledge; I belong to none, and yet everything belongs to me".

15. The Emperor looked at the wonderful dwarf with great surprise. "O mighty Emperor!" continued the dwarf, "You are a lover of truth, always victorious and charitable. Your family history has been glorious. Hiranya, your great-grand-father fought with Vishnu; your grand-sire, Prahladha, could make Vishnu appear before his father. Though you are the last in your family, you are not the least; you drove Indra and the Immortals from Heaven, and you proved your valour in all the worlds. As a ruler, you have spared no pains for the well-being of your people. I have heard of your selfless charity, and am come to beg



"I am come to beg of you a simple boon."

of you a simple boon. Give me out of your empire, land which can be measured by three foot-steps".

16. The Emperor burst out laughing. "O dwarf!" said he, "What you ask for, is no boon at all! You are but a youth. and you do not know what you ask. I have much wealth at my disposal ready to be bestowed on you".

17. "O Emperor!" replied the dwarf, "I know what I ask for. I am a single soul and my desires are humble Riches have no concern with me. A man of great desires knows no happiness. He, who is most contented, is the happiest. You are a great Emperor, and it becomes you to offer great boons. But I am a lowly dwarf, and to ask for a humble favour is in keeping with my position. Grant me, therefore, a three-foot piece of land to sit upon and carry on my meditation. This is the greatest boon that you can confer on me".

IV

18. Sukra-Acharya, the wise minister of the Emperor Bali, understood the

meaning of the cunning words of the wonderful dwarf. He could at once realise the impending danger. "O King of the Rakshasas!" said he, "He is no ordinary dwarf. He is Vishnu himself born to Saint Kasyapa and holy Aditi. He has come with a purpose. Please do not grant him what he wants. His advent is to destroy the Rakshasa race. Though the gift he asks for, is apparently insignificant, yet in reality it is not so. He is sure to bring all the worlds under his divine foot, and you shall be crushed".

19. Bali laughed and said, "These are but false fears; I have given word, and I cannot break it."

20. The clever minister did not keep quiet. He continued saying, "O King! It is but just to keep one's word; but if one's ruin is to be brought about by so doing, it is better to break it. Life is too strong and majestic to be shaken by a lie. The Vedas and Sastras permit one to tell a lie when his life is at stake".

21. The Emperor pondered over the advice given by his loyal minister. "You are speaking as a man of the world", said he; "Once upon a time Mother Earth complained to Brahma, the creator, that it could bear anything except a liar. I, therefore, consider it the greatest sin to say one thing, and do quite the contrary. Man should abide by his word. Blessed is he, who is true in thought word and deed. Kings and Emperors fought bloody wars, and acquired large territory. But everything was left behind at the time of their death. Only the good or the evil report of them survived them. If, as you say, this dwarf is Vishnu himself, why should I hesitate to give him what is his own? Come what may, I am bound by my word. I cannot forego the grace of Vishnu, who is ever merciful towards his devotees. My devotion to him is as firm as ever."

22. The minister knew that charity was a passion with Bali. But still he persisted in his advice as he could foresee

the great danger. Bali could not be prevailed upon by the persuasive words of his devoted minister. "My heart", said he to his minister, "is filled with pity for this helpless youth. He says he is all alone without any brothers and sisters, and he never went a-begging. He also says that he knows the secret of all learning. See, how he stretches his innocent hands to receive the lowly boon at my hands! I cannot compose myself to send him away empty handed"

23. So saying, Bali turned towards the dwarf and declared loudly, "I hereby solemnly promise to give you a three-foot piece of land out of my vast empire".

24. The Emperor wanted to pour arghya, in order to ratify his promise. But the water did not fall down from the vessel of gold which was in his hands. The Dwarf discovered the mischief of the minister who got into the vessel by his magical power, in order to save the King from ruin.

25. Bali was astonished at this strange occurrence. But the dwarf thrust cleverly a dry blade of Kusa grass into the vessel, and water began to flow into his hands. Along with the water the helpless minister also fell down with one of his eyes blinded.

VI

26. The Dwarf was granted what he asked for. He was then asked to choose the three-foot land required by him. But to the great astonishment of all the people who were present there, the wonderful Dwarf began to grow in height. He grew taller and taller till at last his head was lost in the clouds. He covered the earth with one foot.

27. Then he said in loud and clear accents, "O King Bali! I have now got a third of the boon granted to me. Where is the rest?" His voice was like a peal of thunder.

28. "O Brahmacharin!" said the Emperor, "There is heaven above; and it is also mine. You can have it."

29. The Dwarf covered the kingdom of Indra with one foot, and said to Bali, "O Bali! you still owe me a third of your boon".

30 Poor Bali bent his head in deep meditation. He had no more to give. "O Lord Vishnu!" said he, "Thy ways are mysterious. I have given thee my all, and I feel very happy. O God! Place Thy divine foot on my head and thus have the third part which is still due to you".

31. So Vamana, the Dwarf, placed His foot on the royal head of Bali.

32. Sukra-Acharya was greatly agitated at the sight of this strange happening. The Rakshasa forces took to arms at once. They cried for vengeance, and their attitude became terrible to look at.

33. But Bali smiled under the foot of the Dwarf, and ordered his followers to disarm themselves, and fall prostrate before the almighty God. The Rakshasa armies implicitly obeyed their King's command and fell on their knees in front of the Divine Being.

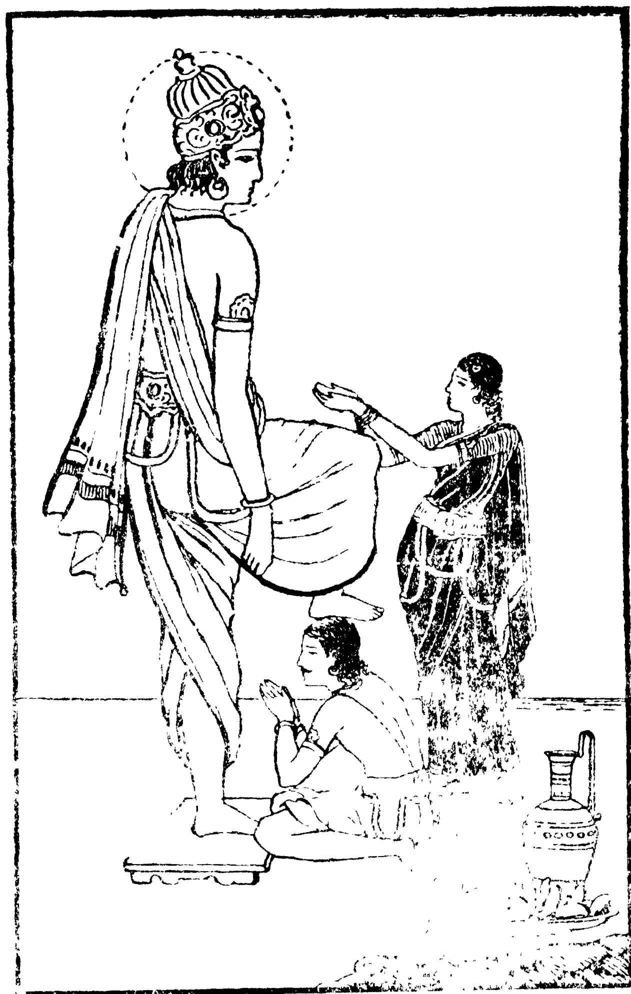
VII

34. Now Queen Vindhyavali saw her evil fate clearly. She bowed down before the Divine Master and wept. "O Narayan!" said she, "Have mercy on us. My husband has given Thee his all. We are Thine; I pray Thee to pardon my husband and grant him his life and liberty."

35. Her tears moved the Dwarf to pity. Said He, "Bali shall no longer live in this world. He waged a dreadful war against the immortals. He shall have to go down to the Under-world, to reign there in peace".

36. So saying, the Dwarf stamped his foot on the crowned head of Bali, and lo! the Emperor went down into the dark regions of the Nagas.

37. Indra was then brought back from the woods, and reinstated on his throne. The family of Kasyapa once more enjoyed



"O Narayan!" said she, 'Have mercy on us.'

the pleasures of Heaven, and the Immortals began to enjoy peace in the capital city of Amaravati.

38. Aditi became extremely happy, and began to praise Vishnu, the Preserver.

39. But what became of the wonderful Dwarf? He disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared.

40. Now the Universe regained peace and prosperity once again; and the inhabitants of the various worlds forgot all fear of tyrants like Bali.

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